

# **Jackson Public School Board Transition Committee**

**Report Prepared**

**By**

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## Background

The Jackson Public School Board Transition Committee was selected for the purpose of developing a list of qualifications that Mayor Harvey Johnson can use to select individuals to be appointed to the Jackson Public School Board of Trustees. The committee operated from the belief that in order for the city to thrive and prosper a top rated public education system needs to exist. The Board of Trustees is the key to changing the tone of the education system within this community.

The committee approached this project by researching and reviewing some basic statistical information from Jackson Public Schools as well as from the surrounding districts. The committee reviewed the Mississippi statutes and the Jackson Public School District policies on the qualifications for the office of trustee and newspaper clippings and articles to the mayor from concerned citizens. From this information the committee was better able to brainstorm and develop a list of qualifications and attributes a person should possess to hold the office of trustee.

A comparison of the qualifications from the brainstorming sessions to other educational groups, discussions with others as well as students revealed a tremendous amount of similarities.

The team was realistic in believing that no one person will possess all of these qualities, however, they should possess as many as possible to have the impact that is needed within the school district. The team further believes that sharing these desired qualifications with the community will create recommendations of individuals possessing these qualifications and attributes.

In Jackson, MS the Mayor appoints people to serve on the Board of Trustees for Jackson Public Schools. Appointees are presented to the City Council for approval. Upon approval by the City Council, appointees serve a five-year term. Appointees may be re-appointed at the end of their five-year term. In some cases, citizens have been appointed to complete a term vacated by a Board member who resigns. The practice in Jackson has been to rotate representation on the five-member school board by ward so that citizens from all areas of the city have an opportunity to serve. **However, regardless of where the Board member resides, his or her service should be to the entire school district and city of Jackson and should not be limited to the people in his or her ward.**

Jackson Public Schools is the fourth largest employer in the city of Jackson and the only urban school district in the state. Members of the JPS School Board have the responsibility of setting policy, governing the school district, and hiring the Superintendent of schools. According to the National School Boards Association, "Nowhere are the challenges faced by education leaders more apparent than in urban districts which often fall under the microscope of public and political scrutiny. Educating roughly one-quarter of the public school students in the United States, urban districts face unique challenges in improving student achievement."

The most recent bond referendum passed with over 80% of the vote – a historic event in Jackson, MS. Every voting precinct in the city turned out over 60% in favor of the referendum. Citizens of the city of Jackson sent a loud and clear message that they are ready to get behind their public schools so that Jackson can move forward educationally, economically, and with better quality of life. Citizens of the city of Jackson deserve a school board that collectively and individually values our trust, operates transparently, and works together to ensure that goals are successfully met. School board appointments should not be taken lightly as they play a critical role in the lives of 31,000 Jackson children and the future of our city.

## JACKSON PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT PROFILE

The Jackson Public Schools District has 59 schools: 8 high schools and a district Career Development Center, 10 middle schools, 38 elementary schools and 2 special schools—Capital City Alternative School and Morrison Academic Advancement Center. Students are enrolled in grades K-12, with 18 elementary schools offering pre-K classes. Every school in the district is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

### Jackson Public School District Facts-At-A-Glance

<b>School Year</b>	<b>2003-04</b>	<b>2004-05</b>	<b>2005-06</b>	<b>2006-07</b>	<b>2007-08</b>
Student Enrollment	31,640	31,611	32,403	31,941	31,191
Average Daily Attendance	93.6%	94.5%	94.6%	94.8%	94.8%
Free Meal plan	77.1%	78%	74.8%	77.5%	80.2%
Reduced Meal Plan	7.6%	7.3%	6.5%	6.6%	5.5%
Full Meal Plan	15.3%	14.8%	18.7%	16%	14.4%
Total Scholarships Offered to Graduates	\$12,050,085	\$14,445,389	\$12,018,042	\$14,410,670	\$14,800,000
Total Employees	4,590	4,615	4,629	4,807	4,779
Licensed Employees	2,158	2,158	2,357	2,389	2,357
Total Teachers	1,958	1,967	1,991	2,081	2,063
Average Teacher's Salary	\$35,636	\$37,882	\$40,228	\$39,667	\$40,100
Budget Total	\$264,466,041.41	\$264,466,041	\$214,430,345	\$214,430,345	308,000,000

**JPS School Ranking According to State Accountability System by School Year  
Starting With 2004-05 SY**

	<b>Level 5 Superior Performing</b>	<b>Level 4 Exemplary</b>	<b>Level 3 Successful</b>	<b>Level 2 Under-Performing</b>
<b>2004-05</b>				
Elementary	4	11	17	5
Middle	0	0	5	5
High	0	1	6	1
<b>2005-06</b>				
Elementary	7	6	19	5
Middle	0	0	7	4
High	0	1	6	1
<b>2006-07</b>				
Elementary	6	13	15	3
Middle	0	0	8	2
High	0	1	5	2

## The 2007-08 School Year Report

Schools throughout Mississippi were *not* ranked as levels 1-5 based on the test data for 2007-08 school year. Instead, schools will maintain their levels from 2006-07 school year. Since the Mississippi Curriculum Test2 (MCT2) was a new test, the Mississippi Department of Education will use 2007-2008 data to work on a new system for determining school levels. The Subject Area Testing Program (ATP) Algebra I and English II test also were revised for 2007-08.

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**—The District met AYP in the other academic indicators for attendance rate (94%) and graduation rate (85%) but did not meet AYP in reading/language and mathematics. 54 school met AYP in all three categories: reading/language, mathematics, and other academic indicators. 54 schools met AYP in reading/language. 55 schools met AYP in mathematics. **District Improvement**—the district is not in district improvement. **School Improvement**—8 schools (14.3% of 56 schools) are in school improvement. **Schools in Year 1 of School Improvement**—there are two (2) high schools in this category. **Schools in Year 2 School Improvement**—there are two (2) middle schools and two (2) high schools in this category. **Schools in Restructuring Plan**—there are two (2) middle schools in this category.

*Source: Jackson Public School District Annual Report Cards 2003-04 through 2007-08 and Office of Accountability and Research*

## Profile of Five Surrounding School Districts

### **Madison County Public School District**

Superintendent- Mr. Mike Kent

School Board- Five Elected Members

Enrollment- 11, 250

3, 693- Free or Reduced Lunch

58% White; 38% Black; 5% Others

21 Schools

10 Elementary

5 Middle

4 High

1 Alternative

1 Technical

11-Non-Title I

763 Teachers

96% Highly Qualified

### **Pearl Public School District**

Superintendent- Dr. John Ladner

School Board- Five appointed members

Enrollment-3, 800

5 Schools

1 High

1 Jr. High

3 Elementary

550 Teachers

20% National Board Certified Teachers

### **Rankin County School District**

Superintendent-Dr. Lynn Weathersby

School Board-Five Elected Members

Enrollment- 18,000

3<sup>rd</sup> largest school district in the state

27 Schools

8 High

3 Middle

16 Elementary



**Hinds County Public School District**

Superintendent-Dr. Stephen Handley

School Board- Five Elected Members representing Districts 1-5

Superintendent and administrators orientate new SB members

Enrollment- 6,600

10 Schools

3 High

3 Middle

5 Elementary

400 Teachers

\$62 Million Budget

**Clinton Public School District**

Superintendent- Dr. Phil Burchfield

School Board- 4 appointed members and 1 elected member

Enrollment: 4,000

9 Schools

1 High

2 Jr. High

3 4 Elementary

1 Alternative

1 Career Center

**Jackson Public School Board Transition Committee  
Recommendations for Qualifications  
Of School Board Appointees**

The five-member School Board should contain professional expertise in several key areas including finance / budget management, policy setting, organizational governance, and management. That is not to say that every School Board member should have all of these qualifications but that these areas of expertise should be adequately represented by members of the Board. At least one member should be a current public school parent, preferably one with professional experience or a strong record of productive and progressive community leadership. All School Board members should understand the time required for service and commit fully to serving the entire district, putting personal agendas aside and making decisions in the best interest of children.

**Attributes of an Effective School Board Member**

*Leadership:*

- Demonstrates ability to build consensus and achieve collaborative outcomes
- Visionary, risk taker, and goal oriented
- Values diversity and includes it in decision making
- Willing to set the example and establish shared accountability at all levels for achievement for all students
- Thoroughly understands the role and responsibilities of school board members as policymakers, not administrators
- Demonstrates effective listening and speaking skills – good communicator
- Exhibits appropriate organizational, fiscal, and leadership skills
- Exhibits personal qualities which serve as a positive role model for children and the community
- Exhibits willingness to participate in training and value for life-long learning

*Education:*

- Demonstrates a commitment to high standards of achievement for *all* children
- Committed to providing quality education to all children through innovative programs, technology, and professional development
- Committed to learning about how schools operate and have a working knowledge of all of the various programs in the district (academic, magnet, athletics, music, arts, health and wellness, etc.)
- Demonstrates a commitment to visit and learn from successful urban school districts outside of Mississippi.

*Community:*

- Demonstrates an understanding of the need to seek parental and community commitment in the decision making process
- Successful track record as a community leader

- Serves as a strong advocate for public education
- Demonstrates an understanding of the need to involve the entire community in the education of our children

*From the Students' Perspective, the "perfect" JPS school board member will:*

- Have experience with children (a parent, grandparent, teacher, etc.).
- Be sensitive and have passion.
- Be acquainted with the Jackson Public Schools from the various education levels (elementary, middle, and high).
- Be acquainted and have compassion for the student needs.
- Support all the staff members and teachers.
- Be concerned with and take action about activities students would be interested in to stay focused on school throughout the school year as well as summer break.
- Recognize the different maturity levels that come with each education level (elementary, middle, high) and adjust the rules and regulations to each level's needs.
- Have some school experience so they can know exactly what it is that teachers and students go through everyday.
- Give more opportunities to having every child's opinion heard.
- Think more about the students.
- Consider rewards that the students who give 100% would enjoy.

*The above attributes should be applicable for all School Board members. Following is a list of questions that might be used as a starting place for assessing qualifications and holding School Board members accountable for meeting these expectations.*

- Explain your vision for our public schools.
- How would you improve parents and community involvement in our schools?
- What has been your experience with our public schools?
- Explain your understanding of the roles and relationships between the school board, administration, and other education stakeholders.
- What do you see as the strengths / challenges of our public schools?
- Share an example of how you built consensus within a diverse group of people.
- What do you think our goals for improved teaching and learning should be? How would you help achieve them?
- How would you hold yourself and others accountable for achieving these goals?
- How would you address our district's financial challenges?

## **Conclusion**

We the members of Jackson Public School Board Transition Committee express our appreciation to the Mayor for allowing us have an impact in such a critical area of our community.

The committee believes that the interest in education in this community is at an all time high, as witnessed by the high percent turn out and approval of the recent education bond referendum. Although, Jackson Public School District is unique in terms of its urban setting as compared to the five surrounding school districts, it can not and should not use its uniqueness as an excuse for not being the best that we can be.

Further, we believe that the mayor showed visionary thinking and leadership in developing, as a part of his transition team, this education committee to create a measuring instrument to use in comparing recommended candidates for appointment to the JPS Board of Trustees. Setting policy, governing the school district, hiring and evaluating the Superintendent are the responsibilities that appointees to the Board should take extremely seriously as they seek to improve student achievement.